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ABSTRACT

Investigation of how children's responses to black and white objects reflect racial concepts is reported. One series of experiments asking Headstart children to guess which objects they liked or disliked were hidden in black or white boxes. Although white children guessed more often that positively evaluated objects were in white boxes, black children also responded in this fashion with less consistency. Self concept statements were also linked to black and white boxes using tape recorded statements. In naturalistic settings, children more often deposited trash in black boxes. When given plastic hats and told to run and smash boxes or bobo dolls, white children tended to hit the black targets first and black children hit white targets first, especially boys. The studies illustrate a method of measuring spontaneous reactions. Results indicate that by preschool age many black children have internalized the unfavorable racial attitudes of the larger society into their own psychological makeup. The assumption that the color white is better than the color black, or vice versa, is a socially relevant misconception which is worthy of change. Since children's attitudes in regard to color or racial differences are more easily modified, the generation to generation transmission of such attitudes may be most amenable to change by a program which focuses on children. (Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.) (DJ)

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Children's Perception of Black and White Boxes and Bobo Dolls as a Reflection of How They Regard Their Own and Other's Racial Membership

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INTRODUCTION

"Black is the color of night, frightful, dark and horrid; but white of the day and light, refreshing and lovely" (From a London, England publication, 1703, cited by Jordan, W. D., 1969)

Such ideas from the past are very much alive today, and there is evidence that such ideas are learned by American children by the time they are four or five years old (Clark and Clark, 1947; Williams, 1970; Stabler and Johnson, 1969). They are readily apparent in dictionary definitions of black and white and in the use made of these colors in the mass media. Children's attitudes toward the colors black and white presumably generalize and influence the favorableness of their attitudes toward Black and White people. There is a general correspondence between attitudes toward the colors black and white and attitudes toward Black and White racial groups (Williams, 1964, 1969, 1970, 1971). Studies of children's aversion to black and preference for white may contribute to an understanding of the development of racial attitudes.

As humans develop the colors black and white become the focus of strongly held sentiments and beliefs. They eventually become shorthand symbols for skin color where they are probably the most important single index for uncritical human evaluation (Franklin, 1968). Lippmann (1922) referred to a type of short-circuiting of the thinking processes involved in the use of stereotypes

to characterize ethnic groups. Ethnic stereotypes were said to "impose a certain character on the data of the senses before the data reach the intelligence." The same can be said for color stereotypes. As Lincoln (1967) noted, "There have been changes in the way Caucasians and Negroes see each other, and profound changes in the way Negroes see themselves . . . yet to say color is dead as an aspect of racial psychosis would be to lay prematurely to rest a troublesome syndrome likely to defy interment." As Whitehead (1930) noted, "Successful high-grade organisms are only possible, on the condition that their symbolic functionings are usually justified so far as important issues are concerned. But the errors of mankind equally spring from symbolism. It is the task of reason to understand and purge the symbols on which humanity depends."

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Previous research (Goodman, 1952; Horowitz, 1939; Stevenson and Stewart, 1958) has demonstrated that racial awareness, including differential preference, is pervasive and that it develops early in life. Clark and Clark's experimentation (1947) on preferences of 3 to 7 year old Black children for black and white dolls initiated the empirical study of the relationship of children's perception of color to racism. They found that Black children had internalized a negative self-concept associated with their racial membership. In his 1971 APA Presidential Address (Clark, 1971), Clark referred to the human struggle for self affirmation, of all but the totally defeated, and the difficulties imposed by others' negative evaluations of the child's fragile, vulnerable, emerging sense of self. The content and dynamics of the emerging sense of self are initially determined almost exclusively by external pressures, determinants, and evaluative agents. Clark maintains that, "This initial external definition of the nature, worth, and status of self tends to persist throughout the life of the individual." Their research had an impact on a national scale and was cited in the U. S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision on

public school desegregation. Consistent with Clark and Clark, Goodman (1952) reported that at ages 3 and 4, 92% of the White children she studied preferred a white doll instead of a brown doll and 74% of the Black children preferred a white doll. The success of attempts to indoctrinate Black children with the concept, "Black is beautiful" have been inconsistent (Poussaint and Comer, 1970; McAdoo, 1970; Hraba and Grant, 1970). Recent investigations (Greenwald and Oppenheim, 1968; Hraba & Grant, 1970), however, have found that Black children in Northern cities now often show more preference for black dolls than white dolls.

Related to this evidence of a change in attitudes, Williams and his co-workers document an increase in positive attitudes to the color black, as measured by the Semantic Differential, on the part of Black adults between 1963 and 1969 (Williams, Tucker, and Dunham, 1971). He has also found, however, that evaluative connotations of black and white color names are generally similar for both American Whites and Blacks, and for Germans, Danes, Chinese, and Asiatic Indians (Williams, Moreland, and Underwood, 1970). Although the evaluative connotations of the color names "black" and "white" have a cross-national and cross-racial character, another study of Williams (Williams, Tucker, and Dunham, 1971) found that Black adults who had an ideological commitment to Black separatism rated the color name "black" more favorably than "white."

Aaronson (1970), using an adjective checklist, found that White adults associated the color black with such adjectives as despondent, gloomy, quarrelsome, resentful, and sullen; and the color white with such adjectives as cautious, obedient, shy and sociable. In order to assess racial attitudes of White preschool children, Williams and Roberson (1967) combined story telling with pictures of white and black animals or persons, and asked such questions as, "Which horse is bad?," "Which is the pretty girl?," etc. Black figures

were evaluated as "bad," "ugly," "dirty," "naughty," "stupid," and "mean." White figures, on the other hand, were evaluated as "good," "happy," "nice," and "clean." Carr (1971) reported that for third grade children minority status in a school is associated with aversion to the color of the racial majority. Children generalize white to Caucasian and black to Negro, and the color-meaning factor acts as one support for prejudice. This statement is supported by spontaneous comments which children have made while being tested (e.g., a White girl pointing at a black box and remarking, "Mommy doesn't like niggers") and by the experimental demonstration, based on operant conditioning procedures, of a functional link between attitudes toward white and black and racial attitudes (Williams and Edwards, 1969).

BLACK AND WHITE BOXES: EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES

Our original interest was in whether or not Black and White children, because of differences in their cultural and experiential backgrounds, develop different preferences for abstract designs (Stabler, Spruill and Eakin, 1967) and objects (Stabler, Johnson, Burke, and Baker, 1969). No differences between races in preferences for designs or objects were found. We subsequently asked children, individually, to guess which of two boxes, a white one or a black one, contained duplicates of the various objects which they had evaluated as positive or negative. We found that, for both White and Black children, duplicates of the good objects were guessed as being in the white box and duplicates of the bad objects were guessed as being in the black box. The strength of this sort of association was greater for White children than for Black children.

Because the procedures and findings of our subsequent studies were roughly similar, I would like to describe this black and white box study in more detail. The children were enrolled either in a Baton Rouge, La., Head Start program, or in private, segregated preschools. Male and female children were represented equally. Forty objects were presented one at a time to each child, and the

child indicated his evaluation of the object by pointing to either a painted (red & blue) smiling face or a painted frowning face. (We devised a five-point scale.) The objects included such items as a rubber snake, a nickel, plastic vomit, a lollipop, a plastic skull, a smashed tin can, a toy watch, a whip scorpion, a balloon, a spider, a yoyo, a cigarette butt, a harmonica, a marble, a ring, a dirty Kleenex tissue, a small winner's trophy, a comb, bubble gum, a plastic rat, and so forth. After the evaluation session, each child was again presented the objects and was instructed to guess which box, the white one or the black one, had another one "just like it" in it. The two boxes were identical in all respects except color. They contained identical objects and were nailed shut. Position of the boxes was counter-balanced. Each box was about the size of an adult head (6x7x9 inches). There was a preliminary step with a small box with a marble in it, which demonstrated to the child that he could guess the contents of a box from auditory cues; and E turned each of the two boxes over several times in order to demonstrate that they provided auditory cues. The child was encouraged to shake the boxes and to listen for the object in it. The basic score involved was the number of objects "guessed" in the white box by each child, and the data were analyzed by means of a 2x2 analysis of variance mixed design, with race as "between" and object value as "within" treatments. No reliable difference was found in the racial comparison, but there was a statistically significant tendency for the children to guess that the positively evaluated objects were more often in the white box than were negative objects. A further analysis showed that Black children responded much the same as did the White children, but they did so less consistently.

In order to link such findings more closely to self-concept and identity formation, we then slightly changed the procedures (Stabler, Johnson, and Jordan, 1971). This time statements reflecting self-concepts were used as stimuli,

rather than objects; and the white and black boxes contained tape recorder speakers. The 32 self-statements (16 pos. and 16 neg.) were: I am happy, I am dirty, I am ugly, I am sad, I am good, I am clean, I am good-looking, I am bad, I am stupid, I am brave, I am strong, I am scared, I am smart, I have lots of fun, I am weak, I am mean, I laugh a lot, I don't have any fun, I am the winner, I hate people, I wish I were somewhere else, I cry a lot, I like myself, I tell lots of lies, I hate myself, I am the loser, I like people, I will do it, I tell the truth, I won't do it, I am nice, and, I am glad I'm here. The children were randomly selected from four Atlanta, Ga., integrated preschools. The procedure involved first establishing the evaluation of each self-statement by having the child point to either a painted smiling face or a painted frowning face; then, later, re-broadcasting each self-statement to the child such that the sound originated with equal intensity from each of two tape recorder speakers, one painted white and one painted black. Each speaker was 15" wide x 25" high x 11" deep, and had short strips of red masking tape to suggest facial features. The child was instructed to indicate from which of the two boxes he thought the statment originated. The child was informed that the sound came from only one speaker, but, actually, except in the case of three neutral statements, it was broadcast with equal intensity from both. (The self-statements had been originally recorded by an 8-year-old White female and an 8-year-old White male. An independent evaluation made of the identifiability of the race and sex of the two children who recorded the statements resulted in non-significant X^2's.) The child in the experiment heard a recorded tape of a child of his, or her, own sex. As before, the children were tested individually, and box location was counter-balanced. The data were analyzed by means of a 2x2x2 analysis of variance mixed design, with race and sex as "between" and statement value as "within" treatments. The basic score involved was the number of statements"guessed" as originating from the

white box by each child. Positive statements were significantly more often than negative statements guessed as originating from the white box, and a significant interaction was obtained between Race and Statement Value. A Multiple Range Test (MRT) to clarify the nature of this interaction indicated that there was a significantly greater tendency for White Ss to guess that positive statements originated from the white box, than to guess that negative statements originated from the white box. Such a difference was not found for Black children. The MRT also showed that Black children reported hearing more negative statements originating from the white box than did White children. Chi square analyses of the data showed that when all 60 children were included, the following self-statements were significantly associated with the white box: "I am good," "I like myself," and "I am glad I'm here." The following self-statements were significantly related to the black box: "I am stupid," and "I am the loser." These analyses also indicated White male and female children had strong associations between positive self-statements and white (11 statements) and between negative self-statements and black (11 statements). When males of both races were grouped together, the analyses again indicated the presence of an association of positive self-statements with white (9 statements) and negative self-statements with black (6 statements). Basically, the children"heard" the positive self-statements coming from the white box and the negative self-statements coming from the black box. The data for White Ss , however, was clearly more in agreement with theoretical predictions than were the data for Black Ss. It was also more in agreement for males than females. In a post-interview, Black children more often than White children "mis-identified" themselves as to color ("Which box is most like you?"). Eighty-one percent of the White children indicated they liked white best, and fifty-two percent of the Black children indicated they liked black best. The percentage of children in each of the four groups who answered the same color to the two questions, "Which

box do you like the most?" and "Which box is most like you?", were as follows: White Male, 81.8%; White Female, 70.0%; Black Male, 50.0%; and Black Female, 72.7%. These post-interview findings are similar to those obtained on three post-interview occasions.

With the assistance of two graduate students, one Black female and the other a White female, we did one more study along these lines. We asked Black and White female preschool children (N = 30) to guess which of three boxes, one black, one white, and the other either orange or green, contained a prize for them. We informed them that only one of the boxes contained a prize (although actually each box contained one). The Black female experimenter tested only Black children, and the White female experimenter tested only White children. The Black children guessed the white box 50% of the time, the black box 25% of the time, and neutral color Box 25% of the time. The White children guessed the white box 60% of the time, the black box 10% of the time, and the neutral colored box 30% of the time. These findings are consistent with our earlier studies and with those of Williams.

The results of these studies show some of the correlates between attitudes toward the colors black and white and children's attitudes toward themselves and others as related to racial membership. Although the data were less consistent for Black children than White children, evidence was obtained that by preschool age many Black children have internalized the unfavorable racial attitudes of the larger society into their own psychological makeup. Cognitive dissonance theories in social psychology maintain that there is a drive for cognitive consistency which, in the present case, would presumably lead to such an ordering of thoughts as, "Black is bad; I'm black; therefore, I'm bad," or, "Black is bad; he's black; therefore, he's bad." Internalization of the concept that the color black is bad may reasonably be expected to add to any difficulties which a Black child may encounter in forming a positive

self-concept and racial identification. Landreth and Johnson (1953) have noted, "though living in a democracy, many Negro citizens apparently learn by three years of age that skin color is important, that white is to be desired and dark to be regretted." Internalization of the concept that the color white is good, on the other hand, may be expected to predispose White children to base self-esteem on factors other than personal merit, and internalization of an aversion to black may lead to a limitation of opportunities to learn how to live meaningfully in a multiracial world.

Although the systematic nature of the results and the consistency of these findings with those of earlier studies supports the major hypothesis, two important considerations should be noted. First, when the "talking boxes" study was replicated, but with the race of the experimenter changed from White female to Black female, the Black children responded differently (Stabler, Jordan, and May, 1971). They reported hearing more negative self-statements originating from the white box. Specifically, they "heard" the white box say, significantly more often, "I am ugly," "I am stupid," and "I am weak." Male Black children reported hearing, significantly more often, the black box say, "I am strong." Black children, when with a Black adult, show a reversal of the association of positive self-statements with white and negative self-statements with black. In this instance, the adult was female, and the reversal was more evident for male children than for female children. In order to rule out the possible influence of individual experimenter effects, an improved experimental design would include more Black and White experimenters.

The second important consideration which should be noted is that although the White children's value system of attributing good to white and bad to black may help engender and reinforce racism, it cannot be, in itself, properly interpreted as an indication of racist attitudes. There are many possible explanations for why children develop such a value system. Unpleasant experiences

during darkness or with dirtiness or burned objects, for example, could lead to an association of black with badness; and, on the other hand, pleasanter experiences during daylight hours, noting the color of milk or sugar, and so forth, could lead to an association of white with goodness. Direct instruction from the parents that white is good and black is bad seems unlikely; however, identification of the child with the parents' value system regarding color is a strong possibility.

Finally, racism itself probably has multiple determinants. Psychoanalytic theorists, for example, emphasize personality factors; in particular the defense mechanisms of denial, projection, displacement of aggression, and rationalization in accounting for racism. Koval (1970) has formulated a synthesis of stages of psychosexual development with the development of a dichotomous symbolic matrix. A White child with racist attitudes presumably attributes to Black people dissociated "bad" psychic content. ("Look into any man's heart you please, and you will always find, in everyone at least one black spot which he has to keep concealed." Ibsen, H., Pillars of society, 1861.) According to both Koval and MacDonald (1970), White children experience skin color anxiety, associated with an unconsciously perceived threat of change in their unstable sense of personal identity, when they encounter Black children. They have presented plausible theories about how attitudes to color might enter into the formation of racist attitudes, but their psychoanalytic explanations are not yet well substantiated by empirical data.

BLACK AND WHITE BOXES AND BOBO DOLLS: NATURALISTIC APPROACH

We next studied the phenomenon in more naturalistic settings by placing large black and white boxes, both marked TRASH, in various locations in the Atlanta area: school playgrounds, parks, etc. Trash was more often deposited in black boxes, regardless of the racial composition of the neighborhood, but

the frequency with which black boxes contained more trash (we counted items) was not statistically significant (Stebler, Spencer, and Gilliard, 1971). We also made a brief film of children destroying black and white cardboard boxes in a public park. As is evident in the film, the children engaged in vigorous interaction with the boxes. We noted that when encouraged to sit down and rest on one of the boxes, children usually chose to sit on the black box. When the White experimenter asked the children which box he could hit with the (plastic) baseball bat, they usually indicated the black box.

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Since there were too few observations in this brief film to permit statistical evaluation of the results, we subsequently filmed 201 episodes (over three hours of film) of children attacking black and white boxes and bobo dolls (Stebler and Mouby, 1972). Films were made at five elementary schools in the Atlanta area. The schools were located in upper-lower and middle income areas. When a group of children came out for recess they were shown an orange bobo doll and encouraged to hit it. Either three plastic bats or "bock-em" mallets were then given to groups of three children each, and they were told to run and smash either two boxes or two bobo dolls. The objects were located equidistant from the middle child and the behavior of the middle child was the principle focus of observation. The three children selected were of the same sex and race. Two cameramen alternated filming on a daily basis; one was a Black male and the other a White male. The person distributing the bats and mallets was a White male. Because of our prior box studies, we expected that children, regardless of race, would concentrate their attacks on the black targets. In general, however, we found that White children hit the black targets first and Black children hit the white targets first. The difference between races in choice

of first target was more pronounced for males than for females. Although the differences between groups were not large they were statistically significant. White males hit black first 58% of the time; White females hit black first 55% of the time; Black males hit white first 57% of the time; Black females hit white first 51% of the time. Other observations, based on all the children tested, although not statistically significant when analyzed separately, showed a consistent general trend: Black boxes were destroyed before white boxes; black targets were hit the most; and the children were often switched over to hitting black targets. There was a tendency (p<.10) for children in younger grades (children in grades 1 through 7 were included) to hit black targets first more often than children in older grades. Filming the children provided a means of attaining high interjudge agreement on what the children did. While there was some loss in experimental control associated with a naturalistic approach, the loss was compensated for by the greater spontaneity of the children's behavior.

One hundred of the children who participated were interviewed after completion of the filming, half by a Black female and half by a White male (Mosby, 1972). The children answered 12 questions dealing with recall of which object they had hit, their black and white color preferences, which colors they believed were preferred by their peers, parents, and teachers, and and so forth. Verbal and behavioral measures were generally consistent. Children who had concentrated on hitting black targets stated they disliked the color black. Although there was evidence of some repression of responses during the questioning ("Don't know" responses), the stated color preferences were generally racially congruent; that is, White children said they preferred white and Black children said they preferred black. Congruence was more evident for females than males. The children's stated preferences were more congruent with the expected preferences of their parents at younger ages

and more congruent with the expected preferences of peers and teachers at older ages. In future research, we want to check the correspondence between children's behavior with black and white objects and their behavior with Black and White children by noting their interaction with others in unstructured situations (e.g., during school recesses or dinners). School records on who fights with whom would provide a means of checking on the generality of the children's aggressive behavior toward black and white objects to aggressive behavior toward Black and White people.

Film #2

These studies illustrate procedures which are structured, yet flexible; disguised in purpose; and they are easily implemented. Children who have interacted with the black and white boxes and bobo dolls have done so spontaneously, without signs of defensiveness regarding their "real" attitudes. Research on ethnic stereotypes has been difficult to evaluate because of the absence of any validity criterion; that is, of establishing the actual distribution of traits within ethnic groups (Brigham, 1971; Gedlacek and Brooks, 1970). The research reported here avoids the problem of a validity criterion because the colors black and white are only different in regard to color. In an objective sense, it is incorrect to maintain, for example, that white is a good color and black a bad one. The assumption that the color white is better than the color black, or vice versa, is a socially relevant misconception which is worthy of change. Such misconceptions may be the first domino in a series of misconceptions which lead to personal and societal maladjustment.

Since children's attitudes in regard to color or racial differences are probably more easily modified than those of adolescents or adults, the generation to generation transmission of such attitudes would appear most amenable to change by a program which focuses on children. Parents and teachers have shown interest in our theory of a connection between color and racial conflict in the schools, and we believe they would consent to implementation of a program designed to de-polarize children's color attitudes. Since such attitudes are multiply determined, there is probably no one sovereign remedy. Operant conditioning procedures, e.g., rewarding non-preferential responses to black and white, has been shown to be one effective method

(Williams and Edwards, 1969). Arranging black and white boxes so that one or the other becomes a reinforcing agent, by either placement of prizes or the broadcast of recorded positive statements, could be expected to produce at least temporary changes. The Rogerian method of encouraging persons to express themselves freely until faulty assumptions are questioned and revised might be a suitable method for some children. Further research may lead to a better understanding of ways to change children's attitudes; however, it is recognized that racism is based on many factors other than attitudes toward the colors black and white. Community norms, conformity pressures, economic factors, type of family instruction and discipline, geographic region, intergroup contact, and situational circumstances may all help to either reduce or perpetuate racist attitudes. Better psychological knowledge and understanding could be, though not sufficient in itself, an important ingredient in the process of reducing racial conflict. We believe there is much to be gained and little to be lost in Psychologists taking more of their sense of direction from human problems.

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